FWIS 104-001:
Science Fiction Survey
Professor Ryan White

Tuesday-Thursday 9:25am-10:40am
Location: Herman Brown Hall 427
Email: rawhite@rice.edu
Office: Herring Hall 312 or (usually) the Pavilion
Office Hours: TR 10:40am-12:10 and by appointment

Course Description:

Science fiction occupies a privileged space for literary representations of our relationships with the future, technology, the environment, individualism, society, and the non-human (or "alien") other. In order to investigate these relationships, this course will survey a wide spectrum science fiction literature from H.G. Wells to its explosive growth in the cold war era and then finally to its contemporary imaginings of environmental crisis and posthumanism. Rather than look to science fiction simply in terms of what it gets "right" or "wrong" about the future, this course will focus on science fiction as a special literary form by examining how the genre constitutes a response to an indeterminate and swiftly advancing future. Science fiction imagines the future through depictions of the advancement of technology and science alongside evolving social and political mores. Through both its anxieties and Promethean hopes, science fiction emerges in the 20th century as a way to anticipate and adapt to a world that is undergoing rapid and seemingly unending transformation. It seems that the only thing we can count on is change itself.

All of this simply means that science fiction depicts a world in transition, a world that only finds itself between a disappearing past and an approaching future. By diving into this transitional space we will confront a series of question about science fiction as a literary genre: To what end does literary fiction speculate about the future? What is unique, if anything, in science fiction as opposed to other forms of literature? What kinds of literary qualities (e.g. language, plot, setting, theme, tone) are specific to science fiction, and how does it deploy them? What aesthetic qualities are paramount in science fiction? In addition, a broader set of philosophical questions will also run throughout this course. We will investigate what both classic and contemporary science fiction has to tell us about technology, humanism, posthumanism, the environment, the nature of life, and the ultimate nature of the universe. We will look at how science fiction attempts to address important political and philosophical problems by placing our humanity always in the context of an uncertain future.

Required Texts:

Arthur B. Evans & Istvan Csicsery-Ronay Jr., *The Wesleyan Anthology of Science Fiction* (2010)
H.G. Wells, *The Time Machine* (1895)
Yevgeny Zamyatin, *We* (1924)
Philip K. Dick, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968)
Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Lathe of Heaven* (1971)
Cory Doctorow, *Down and Out in the Magic Kingdom* (2003)

Suggested Films:
(These are optional but you are encouraged to watch as many as you can.)

Invasion of the Body Snatchers (1956, dir. Don Siegel)
La Jetée, (1962, dir. Chris Marker)
2001: A Space Odyssey (1968, dir. Stanley Kubrick)
Invasion of the Body Snatchers (1978, dir. Philip Kaufman)
Alien (1979, dir. Ridley Scott)
Blade Runner (1982, dir. Ridley Scott)
The Thing (1982, dir. John Carpenter)
Brazil (1985, dir. Terry Gilliam)
The Fly (1986, dir. David Cronenberg)
Total Recall (1990, dir. Paul Verhoeven)
Gattaca (1997, dir. Andrew Niccol)
The Matrix (1999, dir. Andy and Lana Wachowski)
A.I. Artificial Intelligence (2001, dir. Steven Spielberg)
Children of Men (2006, dir. Alfonso Cuaron)
WALL-E (2008, dir. Andrew Stanton)
Interstellar (2013, dir. Christopher Nolan)
Snowpiercer (2014, dir. Bong Joon-ho)
Ex Machina (2015, dir. Alex Garland)

Requirements:

- 15% of Final Grade: Essay 1 (750 words)
- 20% of Final Grade: Essay 2 (1500 words)
- 25% of Final Grade: Essay 3 (2000 words)
- 10% of Final Grade: Oral Presentation
- 10% of Final Grade: Attendance & Participation
- 20% of Final Grade: Response Papers (ranging from 1-2 sentences to 1 page)

This course will emphasize writing as a process of feedback and revision. To that end, each assignment is intended to build upon previous assignments. You are encouraged to improve, elaborate, and build upon your own work as this class progresses.

There will be 3 short essays that will examine the required texts in terms of their literary characteristics and thematic content. Essays may also examine films and other texts not included in the syllabus so long as the required number of assigned texts is met (see below). Each paper must include a Works Cited page and follow MLA standards.

The first two essays will be also be due as drafts and **must** undergo peer review **and** revision before being turned in to me for grading. After grading, the first two essays will be eligible for **one** optional revision after the student meets with me and formulates a clear plan for revision. I must receive revised papers no more than 3 weeks after the original is returned to you. A successfully revised paper can only improve by one letter grade (for example, a revised C paper may only receive a B). I do not read drafts, but I am happy to meet with you to discuss you work as many times as you need.

Essay 1: Descriptive Essay (750 words)

This essay will perform a close reading and analysis of **1** required text (story or novel). The objective of this essay is simply to focus on and **describe in detail** a particular literary aspect of a text (such as language, style, or tone) that captures your attention and then to explain in your essay the **effect** that this particular literary characteristic has on the story or novel as a whole. A good essay will analyze a literary aspect or element of a text through close reading and attention to detail in order to provide a critical insight into the chosen story or novel.

Essay 2: Comparison Essay (1500 words)

The objective of this essay will be to identify a theme, trope, or literary technique across **2 or more** assigned readings and then to show how your chosen stories/novels use these themes, tropes, or techniques for similar or divergent effects. For example, how does the figure of the "alien" appear in multiple texts and what kinds effects do these texts achieve? How do different texts use the notion of the "alien" for different purposes? It's not enough to simply observe that aliens appear in many of the readings, you must also show in detail how each of the readings present a different/similar idea of the alien and use that idea for different/similar effects. For this essay you must refer to at least **1** outside scholarly source (literary criticism, author biography, etc.) and be able to summarize the content or argument of that source as well as explain its relevance for your own argument.

Essay 3: Research Essay (2000-2500 words)

This essay will combine the skills developed in the first two essays while also engaging with outside sources. The student will choose a topic relevant to science fiction and then conduct research into at least **3** scholarly sources that will then be incorporated into the final essay. (You may want to check with me to see if your sources are acceptable.) The outside research must play a significant role in the essay. This research may take any number of forms, and you are encouraged to meet with me to discuss the approach that you might like to take. You must incorporate and analyze at least **2** of the assigned readings and demonstrate how your chosen topic is developed in those texts. Ideally, your research will provide a new perspective on the texts you choose to discuss.

Oral Presentation:

Each student will lead the class in a short **informal** discussion (around 10 minutes) on some aspect of his or her final essay project. The student will present the outcome of his or her research and is encouraged but not required to use media (images, video, sound) to support their presentation. The goal of these presentations is to encourage class discussion and feedback that may then be incorporated into the final paper.

Response Papers:

Students will complete weekly response papers of varying lengths, for which I will often provide a prompt. These papers are intended to encourage active and purposeful reading, facilitate class discussion, and lead the student step by step through the process of developing an essay topic. Most importantly, through both class discussions and presentations, students will learn how to communicate, critique, and then revise their ideas by incorporating feedback from other students. Response papers will be assigned on Tuesday, due on Thursday, and graded for completion only.

ADA Statement:

Any student with a documented disability seeking academic adjustments or accommodations is requested to speak with me during the first two weeks of class. All discussions will remain as confidential as possible. Students with disabilities will need to contact Disability Services in the Allen Center.

Honor Code Statement:

One of the purposes of FWIS is to help new students understand the Rice Honor Code and, more explicitly, to teach students the rules of paraphrasing and scholarly attribution, and the appropriate uses of different types of evidence. Accordingly, FWIS instructors will take an educational approach to transgressions of these rules and respond to errors, rather than as instances of academic dishonesty. At the same time, all FWIS instructors retain the authority to treat instances of repeat or egregious violations as matters for the attention of the Rice Honor Council.

In this course, students are expected to do the actual writing of their assignments on their own, with no outside help from anyone else. However, students are strongly encouraged (and will sometimes be required) to collaborate on all other aspects of their coursework; including discussing assignments, reading each other's work, and making suggestions for editing and revision.

Center for Written, Oral, and Visual Communication:

You are encouraged to make appointments with the peer consultants at the Center for Written, Oral, and Visual Communication for your assignments in this course. These consultants do not proofread or edit your work, but they will provide feedback on topics such as the organization of your paper or presentation, the coherence of your argument, appropriate sentence structure, and consistent grammatical errors. You can make an appointment at the Center's website: cwovc.rice.edu

Class Schedule:

January 12: Introductions

January 14: H.G. Wells, "The Star" (1897, *Wesleyan* 39-49)
E.M. Forster, "The Machine Stops" (1909, *Wesleyan* 50-78)

January 19: *The Time Machine*

January 21: *The Time Machine*

January 26: *We*

January 28: *We*

February 2: Edmond Hamilton, "The Man Who Evolved" (1931, *Wesleyan* 79-95)
Leslie F. Stone, "The Conquest of Gola" (1931, *Wesleyan* 96-109)

February 4: Issac Asimov, "Reason" (1941, *Wesleyan* 160-176)
Clifford D. Simak, "Desertion" (1944, *Wesleyan* 177-188)
Ray Bradbury, "There Will Come Soft Rains" (1950, *Wesleyan* 234-240)

February 9: Arthur C. Clarke, "The Sentinel" (1951, *Wesleyan* 241-249)
Harlan Ellison, "'Repent, Harlequin!' Said the Ticktockman" (1965, *Wesleyan* 367-378)

February 11: **Essay 1 Draft Due**
In-Class Peer Review

February 16: **Essay 1 Due**
R.A. Lafferty, "Slow Tuesday Night" (1965, *Wesleyan* 359-366)
Frederik Pohl, "Day Million" (1966, *Wesleyan* 379-384)

February 18: Robert A. Heinlein, "All You Zombies--" (1959, *Wesleyan* 324-336)
J.G. Ballard, "The Cage of Sand" (1962, *Wesleyan* 337-358)

February 23: Philip K. Dick, "We Can Remember It for You Wholesale" (1966, *Wesleyan* 385-404)
Pamela Zoline, "The Heat Death of the Universe" (1967, *Wesleyan* 415-429)

February 25: Robert Silverberg, "Passengers" (1968, *Wesleyan* 430-442)
Brian Aldiss, "Super-Toys Last All Summer Long" (1969, *Wesleyan* 443-451)
James Tiptree, Jr., "And I Awoke and Found Me Here On the Cold Hill's Side" 1972, *Wesleyan* 516-524)

March 1: NO CLASS

March 3: NO CLASS

March 8: *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*

March 10: *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*

March 15: Stanislaw Lem, "The Seventh Voyage" (1971, *Wesleyan* 490-506)
Carol Emshwiller, "Abominable" (1980, *Wesleyan* 539-546)

March 17: **Essay 2 Draft Due**
In-Class Peer Review

March 22: **Essay 2 Due**
William Gibson, "Burning Chrome" (1982, *Wesleyan* 547-565)
Octavia Butler, "Speech Sounds" (1983, *Wesleyan* 566-579)

March 24: Bruce Sterling, "We See Things Differently" (1989, *Wesleyan* 611-629)
John Kessel, "Invaders" (1990, *Wesleyan* 654-674)

March 29: *The Lathe of Heaven*

March 31: NO CLASS

April 5: *The Lathe of Heaven*

April 7: Octavia Butler, "Bloodchild" (1985)*
Greg Egan, "Closer" (1992, *Wesleyan* 683-697)

April 12: PRESENTATIONS
Charles Stross, "Rogue Farm" (2003, *Wesleyan* 727-741)
Ted Chiang "Exhalation" (2008, *Wesleyan* 742-756)

April 14: PRESENTATIONS
Down and Out in the Magic Kingdom

April 19: PRESENTATIONS
Down and Out in the Magic Kingdom

April 21: PRESENTATIONS
LAST CLASS